

that rear door; so that the man, whoever he was, could not get out.

My horse was now plodding along in the mud at a steady gait. Winding the reins about the whip-holder, I drew my revolver, dropped noiselessly into the mud, and as the wagon passed on I stepped behind to examine the rear door. This was usually fastened by a hasp slipping over a staple, held firm by a padlock. I found that the padlock had been removed, and in its place was a pine stick, so the door could easily be opened by a kick from within. I quickly removed the stick, and in its place slipped the handle of my wheel-wrench, which had been in a leather bucket under the wagon. Knowing that no ordinary man could break out of the wagon with that fastening, I slipped back to my driver's seat as noiselessly as I had left it.

Half a mile farther on we came to a hard road, and I urged my horse into a trot. About this time I heard a thumping noise within the wagon, as if a man was trying to kick out the base of the drop door. This continued for sometime with increasing violence; but I paid no attention to it. It occurred to me, however, that the man might fire at me through the oak partition that separated the driver's seat from the body of the wagon.

At that moment a voice inside called out, "Let me out o' this!"

Expressing as much astonishment as I could, I asked who he was and what he was doing in my wagon, at the same time urging my horse into a faster trot. He replied that he had crept in there to sleep. We were now twelve miles from Jackson, with a good road, and to gain time I kept up a parley with my prisoner, all the time urging my horse to greater speed.

Realizing that the man must soon suspect that I did not intend to let him out until we reached the village, and believing that he would soon begin firing through the oak partition, I quietly slipped off the seat and laid myself down on the footboard, where I still held the reins and continued twitching the lines to increase the gait.

It was lucky that I took this precaution; for I had scarcely made the change when—one, two, three, four—came the ringing reports of a revolver in quick succession. Looking up, I could see in the moonlight four splintery holes about ten inches apart and on a line that would have taken me between the shoulders. Making a shuffling and thumping noise with my feet, as if falling off the wagon, I yelled out, "O God, save me! I'm a dead man!" and then remained perfectly still.

Startled by the shots, my horse broke into a mad gallop, which I encouraged and directed; for I still held

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that "Miss Hemmingway is otherwise engaged." Wouldn't that crust you?

BUT I've been up against this embargo game before, you know; so the first chance I gets I slips uptown to do a little scoutin' at close range. It's an apartment hotel this time, and I hangs around the entrance, inspectin' the bay trees out front for half an hour, before I can work up the nerve to make the Brodie break. Fin'ly I marches in bold and calls for Auntie herself.

"Is she in, Cephas?" says I to the brunette Jamekian in the olive green liv'ry who juggles the elevator.

"I don't rightly know, Suh," says he; "but you can send up a call, Suh, from the desk there, and—"

"Ah, let's not disturb the operator," says I. "Give a guess."

"I'm thinking she'll be taking her drive, Suh," says Cephas, blinkin' stupid.

"Then I'll have to go up and wait," says I. "She'd be mighty sore on us both if she missed me. Up, Cephas!"

"Yes, Suh," says he, pullin' the lever.

I should have known, though, from one look at that to-let expression of his, that his ideas on any subject would be vague. And this was a bum hunch on Auntie. Out? Why, she was propped up in an easy chair with a sprained ankle, and had been for three days! And you should have seen the tight-lipped, welcome-to-our-grand-jury-room smile that she greets me with.

"Humph!" she says. "You! Well, young man, what is your excuse this time?"

I grins sheepish and shuffles my feet. "Same old excuse," says I.

"Do you mean to tell me," she gasps, "that you have the impudence to try to see my niece, after all I have—"

"Uh-huh," I breaks in. "Don't you ever take a sportin' chance yourself?"

She gurgles somethin' throaty, goes purple in the gills, and prepares to smear me on the spot; but I gives her the straight look between the eyes and hurries on.

"Oh, I know where you stand, all right," says I; "but ain't you drawin' it a little strong? Say, where's the harm in me takin' Verona out for a half-hour walk along the Drive? We ain't had a chat for over two months, you know, not a word, and I'd kind of like to—"

"No doubt," says Auntie. "Are you quite certain, however, that Verona would like it too?"

"I'm always guessin' where Vee is concerned," I admits; "but by the latest dope I had on the subject, I expect she wouldn't object strenuous."

Auntie sniffs. "It is quite possible," says she. "Verona is a whimsical, wilful girl at times, just as her poor mother was. Keeping up this pretense of friendship for you is one of her silly notions."

"Thanks awfully, Ma'am," says I.

"Let me see," goes on Auntie, squintin' foxy at me, "you are employed in Mr. Ellins' office, I believe?"

I nods.

"As office boy, still?" says she.

"No, as a live one," says I. "Anybody that stays still very long at the Corrugated gets canned."

"Please omit meaningless jargon," says Auntie. "Does my niece know just how humble a position you occupy? Have you ever told her?"

"Why," says I, "I don't know as I've ever gone into details."

"Ah-h-h!" says she. "I was certain that Verona did not fully realize. Perhaps it would be as well that she— and here she breaks off sudden, like she'd been struck with a new idea. For a second or so she gazes blank over the top of my head, and then she comes to with a brisk, "That will do, young man! Verona is not at home. You need not trouble to call again. The maid will show you out. Celeste!"

And the next thing I knew I was ridin' down again with Cephas. I'm some shunter myself; but I dip the colors to Auntie; she does it so neat and sudden! It must be like the sensation of havin' a flight of trick stairs fold up under you,—one minute you're most to the top, the next you're pickin' yourself up at the bottom.

What worries me most, though, is this hint she drops about Vee. Looks like the old girl had something up her sleeve; but what it is I can't dope out. So all I can do is keep my eyes open and my ear stretched for the next few days, watchin' for something to happen.

CCOURSE, I had one or two other things on my mind meanwhile; for down at the general offices we wa'n't indulgin' in any spring fever symptoms,—not with three big deals under way, all this income mess of deductin' at the source goin' on, and Mr. Robert's grand scheme for dissolv'in' the Corrugated—on paper—bein' worked out. Oh, sure, that's the easiest thing we do. We've split up into nineteen sep'rate and distinct corporations, with a diff'rent set of directors for each one, and if the Attorney General can sleuth out where they're tied together he's got to do some high-class snoopin' around.

Maybe you think too that little Sunny Haired Hank, guardin' the brass gate, ain't wise to every move. Say, I make that part of my job. If I didn't, I'd be towin' a grouchy bunch of minority kickers in where the reorganization board was cookin' up a new stock

THE UP CALL FOR TORCHY

BY SEWELL FORD



WELL! Then business of long breath and swellin' out chest!

That's me! You got the picture? Hold it! You see, it all come so sudden, like I knew it would. No climbin' the ladder for little Percival—not while they run express elevators! And, believe me, when the gate opened, I was there with my foot out!

Course there was a few preliminaries; though I didn't tag 'em that way as they came along. I expect the new spring costume helped some. And the shave—oh, I was goin' it strong! No cut-price, closing-out, House-of-Smartheimer bargain, altered free to fit—not so, Lobelia! Why, I pawed over whole bales of stuff in a sure-enough Fifth-ave. tailor works; had blueprint plans of the front and side elevations drawn, even to the number of buttons on the cuffs, and spent three diff'rent noon hours havin' it modeled on me before they could pull a single bastin' thread.

But it's some stream line effect at the finish, take it from me! Nothing sporty or cake-walky, you understand: just quiet and dignified and rich-like, same as any second vice or gen'ral manager would wear. Two-button sack with wide English roll and no turn-up to the trousers—oh, I should ripple!

The shave was an afterthought. I'd worked up to it by havin' some of my lurid locks trimmed, and as Giuseppe quits shearin' and asks if there'll be anything else I rubs my hand casual across my jaw and remarks:

"Could you find anything there to mow with a razor?"

Could he? He'd go through the motions on a glass doorknob!

Then it's me tilted back with my heels up and the suds artist decoratin' my map until it looks like a Polish weddin' cake. Don't it hit you foolish the first time, though? I felt like everybody in the shop, includin' the brush boy and the battery of lady manicures, was all gathered around pipin' me off as a raw beginner. So I stares haughty at the ceilin' and tries to put on a bored look.

I'd been scraped twice over, and was just bein' unwrapped from the hot towel, when I turns to see who it is has camped down in the next chair, and finds Mr. Robert gazin' at me curious.

"Why!" says he, chucklin'. "If it isn't Torchy! Indulgin' in a shave, eh?"

"Oh, no, Sir," says I. "Been havin' my eye teeth tested for color blindness, that's all."

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Mr. Robert grins amiable and reaches out for the check. "This is on me then," says he. "I claim the privilege."

AS he comes in after luncheon he has to stop and grin again; and later on, when I answers the buzzer, he makes me turn clear around so he can inspect the effect and size up the new suit.

"Excellent, Torchy!" says he. "Whoever your tailor may be, you do him credit."

"This trip I paid cash, though," says I. "It's all right, is it?"

"In every particular," says he. "Why, you look almost grown up. May I ask the occasion? Can it be that Miss Verona is on the point of returning from somewhere or other?"

"Uh-huh," says I. "Bermuda. Got in yesterday."

"And Auntie, I trust," goes on Mr. Robert, "is as well as usual?"

"I'm hoping for the worst," says I; "but I expect she is."

We swaps merry expressions again, and Mr. Robert pats me chummy on the shoulder. "You're quite all right, Torchy," says he, "and I wish you luck." Then the twinkle fades out of his eyes and he turns serious. "I wish," he goes on, "that I could do more than just—well, sometime, perhaps." And with another friendly pat he swings around to his desk, where the letters are stacked a foot high.

Say, he's the real thing, Mr. Robert is, no matter if he does take it out in wishin'! It ain't every boss would do that much, specially with the load he's carryin'. For you know since Old Hickory's been over takin' seven kinds of baths, and prob'ly cussin' out them foreign doctors as they was never cussed before, Mr. Robert Ellins has been doin' a heap more than give an imitation of bein' a busy man. But he's there with the wallop, and I guess it's goin' to take more'n a Five Brothers act to put the Corrugated out of business.

Too bad, though, that Congress can't spare the time from botherin' about interlockin' directors to suppress a few padlockin' aunties. Say, the way that old girl does keep the bars up against an inoffensive party like me is something fierce! I tries to call Vee on the 'phone as soon as I've discovered where she is, and all the satisfaction I get is a message delivered by a French maid